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ABSTRACT

This brief report outlines research completed during the first year of the 12-minute video news magazine "Channel One" to investigate the impact of this program produced by Whittle Communications on varying aspects of schooling. Six researchers with different areas of expertise addressed varying aspects of the influence of the program, which is currently being beamed by satellite to over 2,000 high schools in the United States. (It is noted that the controversy surrounding the use of this program in schools stems primarily from the fact that two minutes of advertising are embedded in each program, and that New York and California have banned the use of the program because of the commercials.) An expert in methods of empirical research conducted a study to measure student's retention and comprehension of current event facts, and administered a survey to measure student and teacher attitudes and opinions about the program. A professor who conducts and teaches case study methodology directed a case study of Channel One at a participating site which focused on the diffusion of innovation in schools, the involvement of teachers in such innovation, and the effect of an innovation on curriculum and teaching practices. Another researcher with experience in policy issues examined the impact of Channel One on curricular issues. An advertising professor and researcher will address the impact of Channel One advertising on the teen viewer. Another team member conducted a structural analysis of the program itself to ascertain what messages are being encoded in the productio and how students are interpreting them. The final member of the research team coordinated the project. A list of 29 focus questions that directed the research team makes up a half of this report. (BBM)

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Title:

The Significance of the Channel One Experiment: Report on the First Year

A SYMPOSIUM

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The Significance of the Channel One Experiment:
Report on the First Year

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Channel One is a twelve minute video news magazine which is currently beamed by satellite to over 2000 high schools in the United States. Produced by Whittle Communications, the program attempts to bring current events to students while they are in the classrooms. The controversy surrounding the use of this program in schools stems primarily from the fact that two minutes of advertising are embedded in each twelve minute program. New York and California have banned the use of this program in the classroom on the grounds that Chris Whittle is selling student audiences to advertisers. (A serious challenge to the California ban is pending.) Without discounting the importance of "Sanctioned ads" in U.S. classroom, we would like to raise additional questions about the meaning of this innovation in school systems.

Concerns and questions abound in any discussion of the use of *Channel One* in our public schools. Many educators are concerned about the impact that such an innovation might have on the students and teachers, the curriculum, and the community itself. Parents are interested in their children having the best educational opportunities, but are questioning if this innovation represents the best.

This symposium is based on a research project which was completed during the first year of the program's broadcast. Six researchers with different areas of expertise investigated the impact of *Channel One* in varying aspects of schooling.

An expert in methods of empirical research conducted a study to measure student's retention and comprehension of current event facts; this research involved over 4000 students in various schools districts. In addition, a survey was administered to students and teachers at the beginning of the year and again after a year of viewing the program; the survey measured attitudes and opinions about the program.

A professor who conducts and teaches case study methodology directed a case study of *Channel One* at a participating site. The site chosen was a small district, with one high school and a junior high. Several teachers and students participated in in-depth interviews and the data was analyzed qualitatively. The report of the case study focuses on several aspects of the project, such as the diffusion of innovation in schools, the involvement of teachers in such innovation, and the effect of an innovation on curriculum and teaching practices. The implications of the project are many, ranging from policy about involvement of private sector in public education to reactions and observations of students and teachers.

Another researcher who has experience in policy issues examined the impact of *Channel One* on curricular issues. When any innovation causes so much debate, policy-makers and decision-makers need to reflect on possible implications of the innovation within schools.

An advertising professor and researcher will address the impact of *Channel One* advertising on the teen viewer. Much of the public news and debate about *Channel One* focuses on the advertising.

Another team member conducted a structural analysis of the program itself to ascertain what messages are being encoded in the production and how students are interpreting them. And, the final member of the research team coordinated the team's efforts.

Specific focus questions directed the research team as follows:

- Do students remember and comprehend current events after watching *Channel One*?
- Do students remember and comprehend commercial advertisements in *Channel One*?
- Does *Channel One* heighten student interest in current events?
- Does *Channel One* heighten student interest in products? advertised?
- In addition to current event information, what messages are embedded in the program?
- How are students interpreting embedded messages?
- What is the impact of *Channel One* on lesson planning?
- What is the impact of *Channel One* on curriculum development?
- For school boards, what are the implications of selling target school populations to advertisers in the private sector?
- What are the implications of private sector curriculum development for professional educators?
- What influenced your decision to use *Channel One*?
- How was the decision reached? Who helped make the decision?
- What was the initial teachers, student, and parent reaction?
- Who coordinates the use of the program?
- Have the teachers been helped in their use of the materials?
- How have students used the information?
- What has been the reaction of the participants?
- What will influence the success of this project?
- What advantages and disadvantages are seen?
- Will the project be continued?
- What other use of the equipment is made or planned?

- When is the program shown?
- How do students feel about the program?
- How do students and teachers feel about the commercials?
- What is the place of so called free and inexpensive materials in the classroom?
- What is the function of journalism in a free society?
- What is the responsibility of citizens in a democracy to fully inform themselves?
- Can the privatization of information and discourse ever be compatible with public discourse?
- Should impoverished school budgets limit teachers and learners to so called free sources of information?